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PROMOTION, PROTECTION AND RESTORATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS
AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

Written statement of Disabled Peoples' International a
non-governmental organization in consultative status
(category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following communication which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[7 August 1991]

1. In many countries, the status of disabled children is not equal to the status of non-disabled children. Most developing countries - and in particular the Asian and Pacific region - share common problems of poverty, illiteracy, economic disadvantage, inadequate distribution of rehabilitation services, social bias and discrimination. In addition, families with disabled children get no support from the Governments and receive no social services. Due to the lack of social welfare and rehabilitation services, the fate of disabled children in these countries is hopeless. Their fundamental human rights, such as the right to live, the right to be taken care of and the right to equal education, have been ignored.

2. In some countries, disabled infants, and especially female infants, are denied even the right to live. They are killed by their fathers, mothers or even doctors. Especially in rural areas, disabled children are foreclosed from medical service and treatment. Even worse, in some cases disabled children are killed because their organs are sold. Another example of cruel exploitation of children is to make them disabled by breaking their arms or legs and forcing them to be beggars.

3. It is a basic human right to have access to free education, at least at the elementary level. Higher education should be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. However, in many Asian countries and in the Pacific, Governments do not make education accessible to disabled children. They do not provide disabled children with special education in integrated schools. They pay no attention to the special needs of disabled students. Female disabled students especially suffer from this kind of discrimination. Disabled girls mostly lead an isolated life in their homes.

4. In the field of health care services disabled children's right to give consent to or reject medical treatment is often violated.

5. Concerning the prevention of discrimination and protection of women, although there have been some advances within the last years of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons in addressing the special situation of disabled women, we have to point out that the issue has not received the attention it merits. Disabled Peoples' International is pleased with the mention the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Despouy, gave to the issue in his final report on human rights and disability (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/31, paras. 140-144). It should be emphasized that there is extremely limited access to health services, education, vocational training and employment for women with disabilities. Furthermore, the problem is compounded by the fact that there is so little research or literature on this critical topic.

6. A major concern of DPI is the issue of sexual abuse of disabled women. Most people do not believe that disabled women are victims of sexual abuse and harassment, and this view is supported by a lack of statistics about these abuses. However, DPI can cite many examples. Disabled women (especially the deaf and the mentally disabled) are frequent victims of rape and other kinds of sexual abuse by family members and men who work professionally for disabled people. Most common, however, is the massive occurrence of sexual abuse of disabled women in institutions, not to mention the total segregation of women in these facilities. (This is another reason why DPI considers institutionalization of disabled people to be a human rights violation; the other reasons have been mentioned in our written statements under agenda items 12 and 7.)

7. Another example of this victimization is in developing countries where disabled women are forced into prostitution as a way of making a living.

8. Women who are victims of sexual abuse have nowhere to turn for medical or legal services. Crises centres are physically inaccessible, in addition to not being able to address particular needs of disabled women.

9. Often, the only treatment these victims are provided with is sterilization. This is another devastating violation of womens's rights. DPI strongly urges the United Nations to take action. To begin to stop these crimes against disabled women, funds are desperately needed to research this subject and to document these violations.

10. In conclusion, DPI urges Member States to focus more attention on these issues and to ensure that disabled children and disabled women have the opportunity to exercise their human rights.